City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE:

APRIL 18, 2005

TO:

THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE POTOMAC YARD DESIGN ADVISORY

COMMITTEE

THROUGH: JAMES HARTMANN, CITY MANAGE

FROM:

EILEEN FOGARTY, DIRECTOR

PLANNING AND ZONING

SUBJECT:

STATUS REPORT ON POTOMAC YARD DEVELOPMENT

This memo provides an update on the progress of the Potomac Yard development.

The process by which proposed development for Potomac Yard proceeds offers extensive opportunity for public input. The process involves both work sessions with the Planning Commission as well as meetings of the Potomac Yard Design Advisory Committee. Over the last five months, in addition to several informal meetings among city staff, there have been ten meetings with the applicant, six formal internal meetings among departments, two meetings with PYDAC and two work sessions with the Commission.

As you know, the Infrastructure Plan is being reviewed now, and includes public and private improvements, such as the major roads and Route 1, the realigned Monroe Street bridge, a pumping station and storm water management master plan.

At the same time, the owner Pulte-Centex (now officially Potomac Yard Development, LLC) has submitted its initial "Land Bay H and Partial Land Bay I Concept Plan," dated December 13, 2004, as well as plans for the linear park (Land Bay K). Staff is now reviewing these plans and discussing them with the Planning Commission and PYDAC, and they will ultimately require development special use permit approval, and will come before the Planning Commission and City Council for formal action.

Land Bay K is the plan for the major open spaces in Potomac Yard, and includes the linear park. It will be discussed with the Parks and Recreation Commission and PYDAC in a joint meeting on May 12. This presents – both in subject matter and process – a real opportunity for citizen input on this important feature of the new development.

Land Bay H includes the area immediately south of the future town center area within Potomac Yard, which is proposed as a primarily residential neighborhood area, with up to 232 residential units, 60,000 square feet of office space, and 5,000 square feet of neighborhood retail. The total number of units will be approved as part of the development special use permit process. The current concept plan has evolved through the series of internal and applicant meetings between December 13, 2004, and February 14, 2005. The Planning Commission reviewed this plan on March 1 and PYDAC discussed it on March 10. Both sessions resulted in similar observations and suggestions. The comments generally focused along the following themes:

- The plan and development should not preclude future opportunities for mass transit and the infrastructure plans should reflect mass transit considerations.
- The plan feels too "suburban." More use of variation in height, setback was mentioned.
- The plan needs more green space "openness" throughout, particularly in the front and/or rear of individual residential units.
- The character and function of Main Street should be more defined, so it has a specific identity and functions as a "main street."
- Questions arose about whether the infrastructure plan as developed in the Memorandum of Understanding will restrict options in Land Bay G design.
- There was concern that the view from Route 1 would be just the rear of buildings.
- Concern was also expressed about the potential edge conditions: that is the view of the rear of buildings as seen from the alley entrances.
- The City needs to continue to ensure compliance with the Potomac Yard Urban Design Guidelines.

Many of the concerns expressed represent the natural conflict between a Concept Plan and Design Guidelines approved several years ago and the actual design as it now evolves. The challenge will be to find a balance between the minimum (or maximum) compliance with the guidelines, responding to the applicant's present-day concerns, and ensuring that the community expectations for public benefits are met.

Upcoming Meetings

Staff is meeting with the applicant to review the concerns expressed at the two March meetings and will return to the Planning Commission on May 3 for another Work Session. The applicant is working with the City to address these issues. The Planning Commission session will also focus on the overall transit plan for the Potomac Yard project. PYDAC is planning an additional meeting for the week of May 16 to discuss Land Bay K and Land Bay H.

The Department has created a link on the Planning and Zoning website which makes all of the

information discussed at the PYDAC and Planning Commission meetings available to the public. The website also includes the Memorandum of Understanding and the original approvals by the City and will be continually updated as new information is submitted by the applicant or discussed at a public meeting.

It is our goal to continue to involve the Planning Commission and PYDAC and allow extensive community input at each meeting to achieve a high quality development for this visually prominent development site in the City.

cc: Cathy Puskar, Attorney for Potomac Yard
Duncan Blair, Attorney for Potomac Yard
Michele Evans, Assistant City Manager
Mark Jinks, Assistant City Manager
Richard Baier, Director, T&ES
Arthur Dahlberg, Director, Code Enforcement
Kirk Kincannon, Director, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
Interested Community Members